

# Wizards with Class

By Skip Williams



Wizards are among the most popular characters, and for good reason. Thanks to their wide selection of spells, they're among the most versatile and powerful characters in the game.

## The Pros and Cons of a Wizard

The wizard is the party's magical powerhouse. She can boost her party's combat effectiveness, help her compatriots scout, and levy fiery magical assaults at the enemies. Depending on whether or not she specializes, she may have access to nearly any kind of arcane spell.

### Wizard Assets

When you chose a wizard, you gain access to a wide range of powerful spells, but the class has a few hidden resources as well. Below are several assets you have going for you when you play a wizard.

- **High Skill Points:** Don't let the wizard's paltry two skill points per level fool you. A wizard needs to have a high Intelligence score because that ability governs her spellcasting. But a high Intelligence score also boosts the number of skill points she has available.
- **Good Will Saves:** A wizard uses the best save progression in the game for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural mental strength helps her resist most effects that fool her mind or assault her spirit, including charms, compulsions, illusions, *fear* effects, and even *inflict* spells.
- **Good Spell Selection:** The wizard's spell list has unmatched breadth and depth, and virtually its whole range is open to her. With the right spell, she can damage or slay foes, whisk herself (and her friends) to safety, discern hidden truths, throw up impassible barriers, or even create useful items out of thin air.
- **Bonus Feats:** Scribe Scroll, which the wizard gains as a bonus feat, lets her pack extra spells along on any trip. She also gets bonus item creation and metamagic feats as she attains higher levels.
- **Familiar:** By spending a little cash, a wizard can gain a familiar who can serve as a spy, lookout, and general assistant.
- **School Specialization:** A wizard can gain more spellcasting ability by giving up access to part of the wizard spell list. This kind of specialization can also be a great roleplaying hook, especially if she chooses a specialty that matches her temperament or history.

### Wizard Weaknesses

Wizards pay a heavy price for their spellcasting abilities. Here are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a wizard character.

- **Low Hit Points:** The wizard's 4-sided Hit Dice give her very few hit points.
- **Poor Armor Class:** Because the wizard has no proficiency with any kind of armor or shield, she generally has a low Armor Class. The combination of low hit points and low Armor Class makes her extremely vulnerable in physical combat, especially melee. She can use spells and magic items to improve her defense, but doing so makes them less available for other purposes.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** A wizard's base attack bonus is +1 per two wizard levels, which is the worst in the game. Wizards can dish out lots of damage with their spells, but they don't do well with weapons.
- **Poor Reflex and Fortitude Saving Throws:** Wizards have the worst progression for Fortitude and Reflex saves in the game (see Table 3-1 in the Player's Handbook). Thus, they aren't so great at avoiding attacks on their bodies.

## Playing a Classy Wizard

Great wizards usually use the following techniques. So if you're playing a wizard, try to incorporate them into your strategy.

### Thinking Ahead

As a wizard, you have to make many of your most important decisions before an adventure begins. Your most important piece of equipment is your spellbook, and its contents are largely up to you, so consider your choice of spells carefully. In general, it's best to include a mixture of offensive, defensive, and utility spells in a spellbook.

Once you've built your spellbook, you still have to choose spells for each adventure. Try to anticipate what kinds of effects you and your party may need during the upcoming journey and select your spells accordingly.

Because of your low hit points and Armor Class, you are among your party's most vulnerable members. So make sure you have a proper place in the party's marching order -- preferably in the middle, so that at least one ally stands between you and your foes.

Your party relies on you to deal the decisive blow in most battles, or at least to wear the enemy down with a steady magical assault. But if you're going to fulfill that role, you cannot be concerned only with your own safety. You have to stick close to the action. If you're using defensive spells, try to cast them ahead of time so that they're already running when a fight starts. You don't want to be fiddling around with them while enemies are overwhelming your party's front line.

### Remember Your Friends

The sheer power you command as a wizard can make you cocky. In truth, however, physical attacks can defeat you pretty quickly, so you need the rest of your party for protection. In addition, you have to be careful not to become your party's worst enemy

**The Party's Front Line:** The rogue, ranger, bard, or monk in your group is likely to serve as a scout for the rest of the party and can often locate your foes for you. These characters, along with the party's more heavily armored individuals (particularly fighters and paladins), also form a fighting line that keeps enemies away from you. So be ready to support them with spells in case they get into trouble. And when casting your spells, be careful to aim them so that your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than

misaimed spells that hurt friends as well as foes.

**Other Spellcasters:** You probably aren't the only spellcaster in your party, so don't act as though you are. Divine spellcasters such as clerics and druids have potent spells too, and you should try to avoid duplicating what those characters can do when selecting your spells. The same courtesy also applies to other arcane casters. Bards and sorcerers have a limited spell selection, so put some effort into making up for gaps in their spell lists. If the group has another wizard, the two of you can coordinate your daily spell selections and swap spells for your spellbooks as well.

## Some Key Equipment

As a wizard, your spells are more important to you than your gear. Nevertheless, a few pieces of the right equipment can make your career longer and happier.

- **Spellbook:** Your most critical piece of gear is your spellbook, so guard it well and keep a copy in a safe place. If you do much wilderness adventuring, you'll need to take your spellbook along so that you can replenish the spells you use up. If you've accumulated a large number of spells, consider traveling with a backup spellbook that contains only the ones you use most often. Such an item is often called a traveling spellbook. If you lose it, you can replace it much more cheaply than your main spellbook.
  - **Melee Weapon:** You're not much good in melee, but you never know when you'll have to resort to hand-to-hand combat. So carry a quarterstaff or a dagger -- or both -- so that you're not defenseless when your spells run out or fail.
  - **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack spell against some opponents. Use it when you want to conserve your spells or when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit their use.
  - **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells. Furthermore, you never know when you'll need a particular spell -- and need it very badly. So it pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve via a collection of scrolls, wands or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry along useful spells (such as *knock*, *dispel magic*, or *remove curse*) that you might not use in every adventure. Best of all, you can make scrolls yourself, though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points. Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, especially attack spells such as *magic missile*, *fireball*, or *lightning bolt*.
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## About the Author

**Skip Williams** keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of *Dragon Magazine* for eighteen years. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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